INTERNATIONAL SUFI MOVEMENT

2023 RETREATS

Even the branches swing in ecstasy when they receive Thy message.

Pir-o-Murshid Inaya Kahn

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INTRODUCTION

This booklet was made possible by the contribution of mureeds around the globe who kindly shared their reflections about in-person retreats held during 2023.
We hope you may find in their words inspiration for your own path. You may recognize the teachings of Pir-o-Musrhid Hazrat Inayat Khan reflected in the hearts of those who, after a hundred years of his work, are still being enlightened by his guidance and wisdom. These testimonies share the same essence of love, harmony, and beauty that prevails in the retreats of the International Sufi Movement (ISM) worldwide and that joins us in a single brotherhood and sisterhood.
Hazrat Inayat Khan believed that at the core of every individual, regardless of race, religion, or background, a divine essence unites all beings. His teachings often emphasized the importance of recognizing this shared essence and cultivating a sense of unity, compassion, and understanding among all people. Let this booklet be a small proof of the way his teachings continue to unite humankind.

AUSTRALIA

Azad Daly (AU)

IN SEARCH OF THE SACRED

Because of the Covid Pandemic and the next 'lockdowns' that occurred here in Melbourne (we were the most locked down city in the world: 262 Days), we didn't have a Retreat in 2020/ 2021 & 2022. No International Flights were allowed into the country for almost 2 years!

Obviously, the loss of personal contact was felt although Zoom proved to be a blessing but obviously not as good as the weekly meetings and greetings we held in our home.

What I experienced when we were able to finally hold a retreat at the Amberley Retreat Centre was the joy of actually being able to physically hug and greet fellow Mureeds for the first time in years, i.e. a simple tactile response!

As I looked over the Retreat Booklet and saw the paragraphs that I had highlighted it was relatively easy to recall what impressed me then, and the realization that these have imprinted themselves on me and my daily practices.

The topic of our Retreat was 'The Search for the Sacred' and Pir Nawab had given us a wide range of sources relating to this in this 35 Page Retreat Booklet. On the front cover of the Booklet it posed three questions :

- Do we live a mundane life of limitation?
- Or do we live as if life were a sacred gift?
- Is it possible for each moment to be 'spiritual'?

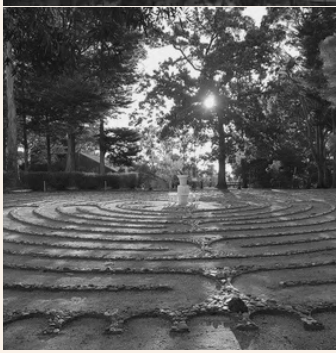
The third question was and is, to my mind, the crucial one!

This question for me was/is that at some stage in everybody's life, there is the Universal question that arises in every human being: 'What am I here for?' or 'There must be more to life than this?'

It also raised the question: What, or how, do we see or experience God?

AUSTRALIA

Azad Daly (AU)



"It is indeed an error on the part of man to limit God in the idea of a Personal Being, and it is wrong in the person who believes in the Absolute God to efface the Being of God from his conception of it. As they say: `To explain God is to dethrone God.' To say that God is abstract is like saying: 'God is the space, God is the time.' Can you love space? Can you love time? There is nothing there to love.

The most advisable thing for the believer in God is to first make his own conception of God…therefore if a person conceives, even the highest and best way of conceiving will be the highest and best that man can do".

This question had arisen for me on numerous occasions throughout my life:

"… what we have to learn from religion is one thing, and that is the knowledge of truth. At the same time, Truth cannot be spoken in words. Truth is something that is discovered, that is not learned and taught."

This, for me was, and is, the most basic and obvious first step on the spiritual path.

AUSTRALIA

Azad Daly (AU)

If someone asks you: "What is Sufism? What religion is it?" you may answer,

"Sufism is the religion of the heart, the religion in which one thing is most important, and that is to seek God in the heart of mankind."

"A way of realizing the Sufi principle is to recognize in one's own feeling the feeling of God; to realize every impulse of love that rises in one's heart as a direction from God."

I am just using these few quotes – there are literally 100's of them in this Booklet.
The outcome of this, for me is that I now carry a deeper and meaningful understanding God (if this is possible?) and my daily practices are now more meaningful to me than ever, and I thank God daily for this spiritual insight.
Truth and Belief represent everything!

SACRED DANCES

Nirtan Pasnak

In this video, Nirtan is teaching the movement of a sacred dance so that participants in the retreat of Bogota can feel deeper the divinity.

SACRED DANCE TO MOTHER EARTH

Mother Earth
That is present in all
the space
I humbly offer
my gift to you.
Please forgive me for
standing on you
Your dust is like the
light of my eyes.
I offer gratitude
and greet the God,
the saints
and all the people.

TARRAGONA

Latifa Ángela Castillo (SP)

LA CONSTRUCCIÓN DEL CARÁCTER [BUILDING CHARACTER]

It has been a very intimate, subtle and deep retreat.
We were accompanied by the inspiring and invaluable guidance of our Pir-o-Murshid Nawab Pasnak and we worked in a beautiful Mediterranean landscape on the property of our dear brother Aziz Livio Panieri.
One of the lessons that this retreat has taught us is to realize that the purpose of our life is to find how to use the Divine gift of Willpower. Willpower is directed Consciousness; We have this gift from God and many times we do not realize it. It is willpower that allows us to focus the attention of our thoughts and actions to fulfill the deepest desire of our soul, which is to make God a reality in our hearts and have the firm conviction that it is possible and always within our reach.
We can strengthen our willpower through prayer and by doing so try to prevent it from being a lifeless mechanical act. The best attitude to pray is Hospitality.

Lord, this is Your house. Do whatever you want! I trust You, I trust You listen to me.

TARRAGONA

Latifa Ángela Castillo (SP)

God always listens to us when we speak sincerely, when we surrender before Him.

Lord, I can't do it alone; Help me

And if in this state we look at all the things that are in our hearts, our feelings... then maybe we could take a step back and be aware that it is perfection that feels...
What do you feel now my Lord?

For example, the sadness we feel may be the nostalgia that God has for us, because we remember that what we feel is what He feels.
And so little by little we can identify what needs to be healed, what needs to be removed, what needs to be cleaned in our hearts, which we must not forget is the heart of God.
The Ability to manifest the power of God within us comes from Cleansing our hearts. The heart is AKASHA, a capacity, a resonant space like the gourd of an instrument.

The problem is that it is often full of debris, suspicion, hatred, resentment. If we want Beauty to fill the space of the heart or for Music to sound there, we have to clean it, empty it. That is when it becomes His instrument.
The beginning of spiritual work is the purification of our heart and the construction of the Divine Ideal. Before a Master whom we love and have given our trust, we have the opportunity to open our hearts... And when there is love and respect for Him, we behave with consideration towards our ideal.
As we advance along the path we have more maturity to recognize that we need more prayer, more service,...
It is very important to be clear:

Who do I serve?

To play my role in the Symphony of Life at every moment.

KATWIJK SUMMER SCHOOL

Noor van Duijn (NL)

O INSPIRING GUIDE! THROUGH LIFE PUZZLING WAYS

The Summer School in the sufi temple "Universel Murad Hassil" in Katwijk was very inspiring in many ways. As always, the program was divers: teachings, breathing practices, wazifa, zikr, prayers with movements, commemoration of Viladat day, sacred readings, stories, group work, qi gong, music, sacred dance, nature meditations, the Universal Worship, and healing service. These were as beads on a chain, a chain which becomes stronger and stronger.

The atmosphere was open and harmonious between the approximately 35 participants: not only from the Netherlands, but also from Ecuador, Colombia, Australia, UK and South Africa. During the meals and pauses was much space to talk with each other and share experiences or personal stories. We got the feeling as we were a caravan serai travelling on a sufi path, each his or her own way, but all knowing we have so much in common. It´s encouraging to realize there are brothers and sisters worldwide which share the same ideal.

KATWIJK SUMMER SCHOOL

Noor van Duijn (NL)

On the personal level it was so precious that this time I could attend all these days. Besides this, I was entrusted to contribute actively to the program. This was a practice in itself, but fortunately it worked out in a good way. The inspiration during the preparation for these parts and the energy felt during these particular moments gave me a deeper attunement and feeling for the Message. I could recommend everyone to become a worker during retreats!

It's a mystery what is going on on the unconscious level; 'something' is in process, maybe by the purifying power of the elements (our 'friends' as Md. Nawab said) or the wazifa 'Ya Quddus', and maybe by the thread of sympathy, trust and love. Anyway, what is perceptible after a while is the feeling of more purity, happiness, strength and a more receptive, sensitive and loving heart. This still had an effect after the Summer School, in the midst of daily life which could sometimes be challenging of course. The Inspiring Guide really helps me through life puzzling ways!
I am very grateful for the sincere, inspiring and loving guidance of our Pir. Alhamdullilah!

COLOMBIA PANLATINO

Karima Rosario Garibai (MX)

EL ALIENTO DIVINO [THE DIVINE BREATH]

Dear brothers and sisters, it is an honor and privilege for me to be able to share with you what I learned at the retreat I attended in September. The theme was the Divine Breath. At first it seemed too high and unattainable, as well as incomprehensible. I thought, at the time, that for me it would unattainable. However, I learned that by being aware of my breath I am in connection with the One, and I can enter my heart more easily.

Opening and entering into the heart of the experience with my brothers and sisters was something magical. The harmony, the love that was felt in the environment was something incredible. They were days of hard work, but it was not heavy because of the Harmony that was lived at different times.

COLOMBIA PANLATINO

Karima Rosario Garibai (MX)

Since that moment, I have been able to practice my deep and close breathing with the creator. I have lived very challenging moments, my mother´s long illnes, and being her companion in the moment that she decided to return home with The Father.

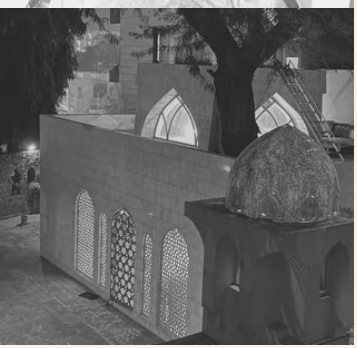
At this moment it has not being easy to write these few words, my mind sometimes is far away, sometimes is so sad and in moments is very happy and calm, but my reality is that God lives in my heart and with my breath I am in line with God.

Brothers and sisters, I believe that breathing practices, whatever each of us practices, bring us to the awareness that God dwells in our hearts and is inherent in us.

God bless you

DARGAH RETREAT

Haniyya and Farhan Harradine (UK)



MASTERY

During October this year we had the good fortune to attend a retreat on the subject Mastery at the Dargah Sufi Hazrat Inayat Khan in New Delhi. The teaching and guidance was given by Pir-o-Murshid Nawab who we all thank for his guidance and patience. We would also express our gratitude to Dr Farida and the wonderful staff who looked after us all in every way. We were also privileged to attend several concerts of wonderful music that was a joy and an expression of love.

As many of you know this is the perfect location for those on the Sufi Path: an atmosphere like no other and surrounded by the energy of so many Sufis who have gone before us. We all had the opportunity, immediately prior to the retreat, to visit many of the local Dargahs to experience the unique feeling of each. Feelings we will not forget and indeed aided us to attune to the retreat subject.

DARGAH RETREAT

Haniyya and Farhan Harradine (UK)

There were Mureeds present from Australia, Kashmir, The Netherlands and the UK. One of the great strengths of the retreat was the support of all our sisters and brothers. We all made friends; strengthened friendships and we all returned home understanding to a greater degree the feeling of brotherhood and sisterhood.

Our schedule for the retreat was one that encouraged discipline which of course is a keystone of what we may call Mastery. We would meet several times a day for: prayer; practices; discussion; and Zikr. In addition we had personal practices to work on and times for reflection and silence.

The teachings of the retreat can be expressed by the following quotes provided in the materials:

The mind must be one's obedient servant; when it is a master life becomes difficult
(Gayan Boulas)

Master is he who masters himself; teacher is he who teaches himself; governor is he who governs himself; and ruler is he who rules himself
(Gayan Talas)

Mastery, particularly, the concept of Mysticism was explored. Mysticism was defined by Hazrat Inayat Khan as the process of going from limitation to perfection.

DARGAH RETREAT

Haniyya and Farhan Harradine (UK)

We were given the following quotes from Hazrat Inayat Khan to assist our understanding of Mysticism:

"All pain and failure belong to limitation. All pleasures and success belong to perfection. In one's own surroundings, one will find that those who are unhappy and dissatisfied with life and who make others unhappy, are those who are more limited. Those who can help themselves and help others, who are happy and bring pleasure into the lives of others, are nearer to perfection...What is meant by limitation and what by perfection? These are only conditions of the consciousness. When one is conscious of limitation, one is limited. When one is conscious of perfection, one is perfect".

Pir-o-Murshid Nawab gave us the following, which we have pondered upon at the retreat and indeed has been a constant reflection since: "Eat without eating; drink without drinking, talk without talking". This has as a reflection of the retreat combined with the practices been a source of concentration, contemplation and meditation.

As time has passed since the retreat the importance of these teachings has multiplied as we have settled back to our daily lives. We suspect that the real teachings that came from the retreat, as many others far more experienced on the path know, are such that we do not realise or comprehend them yet.

DANCE TO GANESHA

Nirtan Pasnak

To the happy dancing Ganesha I pray.
He holds in his left hand a sweet ball laddoo and in his right hand he holds his tusk with which he writes. Ganesha is a patron of the arts and of letters as, according to the legend, he broke off one of his tusks to write the Mahabharata. He loves to eat, has a round belly and rides on a mouse.

The one who could not be known, who is associated with the first chakra, the Muladhara, from which all manifestation has evolved. He is the primeval sound OM, which he sings. He is elephant faced and is magnificent.
To Ganesha's father, Shiva:
Saint Saranda and all the people adore Shiva, holding him in the heart and worshiping him. They sing and dance in praise of him. All the people that come to him under the Mandara (coral) tree get their desires fulfilled. You are extremely beautiful with your divine body. We worship you who is incomparable in beauty, who sings devotional bhajans, all the people worship you and bring flowers to you.
Your feet are like lotuses, shining like emeralds. You have the head of an elephant; you are eternal, indestructible, deprived of any sin, generous, providing with all goodness.
You are shining with the whole body and have just one tusk.

BARCELONA

Falakara Gabriela León (EC)

IN AND OUT THE BREATH

I was running late, but then I arrived. Biscuits, coffee, sun rays intense as if in summer days, through red curtains that veiled the industrial park. The sun glared at the persian carpet interwoven with golden shapes and flowers that held our circle: very close, very intimate, very sufi. But no, what really held us there was not the sun nor anything else, was our thirst and our faith. I do not know what faith is, as I know it now,and I will tell you here. A train passes every now and then near our location as a powerful reminder to us of all, if any, words to count how grateful we were (and are): Murshid Nawab and Nirtan were there among us. So, in this very close circle we bowed and lowered our heads to our hearts, and we began.

Love has taken away my practices and filled me with poetry.

A year ago, when I was initiated as a Mureed, a friend told me that he wouldn't pursue the spiritual practices because he wouldn't like to be like them, people who are actively and constantly expressing their faith. I understand why is that, I also have a fear of rejection

BARCELONA

Falakara Gabriela León (EC)

which arises in a culture that underestimates deep spirituality. I feel it every time I need to close my eyes in prayer and I see there is no place for that in Western culture. Yet I also know the radical difference when I start my day with the practices and when I don't. More than that, sometimes I wonder and I wish if I could only remain in that state of deep connection, how different would my interactions be?

A mountain keeps an echo
deep inside itself.
That's how I hold your voice.

Hazrat Inayat Khan in the Gathas (Pasi Anfas) says be aware of the breath. Our subject for the retreat. I didn't acknowledge until those days how that essential practice of sufism was missing in my everyday life. I not only arrived coughing to the retreat, but also with a huge bag of impressions on top of me. We are taking so much of the world all the time. So, making time for my practices every morning was already doing miracles: it gave me incredible peace to cope with the constant impermanence of situations, it gave me hope, and it gave me ease with all that cannot be controlled. Yet by the end of the day I was dry.

A great soul hides, like
Muhammad, or Jesus, moving
through a crowd in a city
where no one knows him.

Rhythm, depth, purification, concentration, direction, don't we want to own our lives? Taking awareness on the breath seriously, is like pulling a stream of light from the most pristine space you can find from the practices, and then pouring that light in an imaginary bottle, so then, you can sip it whenever you need to. Now, it's not only a refill, the breath offers you the powerful choice of freedom at a spot, one that can only be attained with consciousness. So then one can inquire, what kind of experiences one desires? What are you

BARCELONA

Falakara Gabriela León (EC)

focusing on now? Which thoughts are you bringing into life with energy, words and actions? Faith, as a result, becomes a decision that actually comes back to you with the responsibility of self awareness, self regulation, and self mastery.

To praise is to praise
how one surrenders to the
emptiness.

In a beautiful practice of invocation and purifying breath with fikr (inhaling Thy Light is in all forms, exhaling Thy Love in all beings) I imagined the tree of breath as a living being inside me with so many little stalks like fern leaves grasping every physical and emotional impression from the world at all times. My attention was to my heart. A big light beating as if it was the center. I felt pain in there, so when I shared about this, I learned that there is no center, every part of my experience is made of pulsing light that can be highlighted as well.

Moreover, pain, whether physical or not,tends to draw all the attention to itself. So the breath comes handy again, it helps to shift the perspective even amidst the perceived restraints or even amidst the struggle. It is about practicing to notice it, to shape its depth, to mark a rhythm, to focus on The All-pervading, and to clear up. It is also faith, the kind that surrenders all the unconquerable quarrels to God, The Divine Breath. Now I know that through decision and belief: all unsurpassing struggles are there, because God is there, and all counting blessings exist at every moment, because God is there too.

I saw you and became empty.
This emptiness, more
beautiful than existence,
it obliterates existence, and
yet when it comes,
existence thrives and creates
more existence.

*The phrases in italics are verses from Rumi, Buoyancy, available here: https://intrinsicheart.com/buoyancy/

FINAL WORDS

Pir-o-Murshid Nawab Pasnak

Once, many years ago now, we were holding a Sufi retreat in a venue rented from a religious community. Which community it was and where it stands does not matter.When we first arrived at the venue, I felt some concern that we might in one way or another offend the beliefs of the community, but I was told, 'no, no, it will be all right.' So we enthusiastically spread ourselves out and began to do our work –prayers, meditative walks, practices with sound and breath and so on. And as I have seen again and again, people began to change. Then, part way through the retreat, the head of the community that was hosting us asked to have a talk with me. I again felt apprehensive, fearing that we had caused some offense. But when this person sat down with me, and when my flowery courtesies had been brushed aside, the rather blunt question surprised me: "You and we, we believe more or less the same thing. But your people are so much happier than ours. Why?" It was not possible to give a satisfactory answer in that moment, and still I would be reluctant to make any particular claim, and yet the recollections in this little booklet of some of the participants in retreats of the past year seem to support that person's observation. Hazrat Inayat Khan said that the soul itself is happiness, and when we begin to approach that happiness in the company of a loving family, the experiences speak for themselves. Heartfelt gratitude to those who shared their memories, and to all those who participated in these retreats, and of course to our sister Darafshan Anda who conceived this booklet and brought it to realization in such a beautiful way.

INTERNATIONAL SUFI MOVEMENT

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